

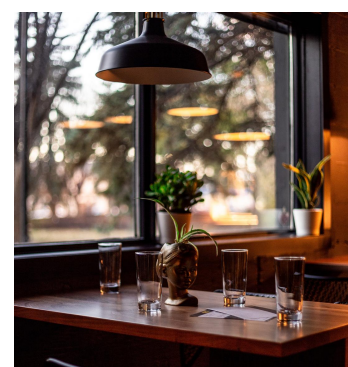
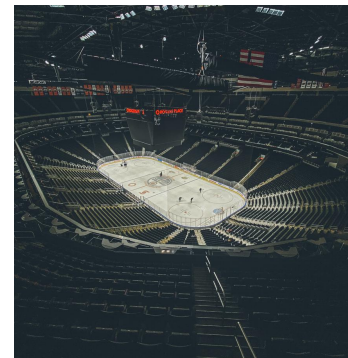
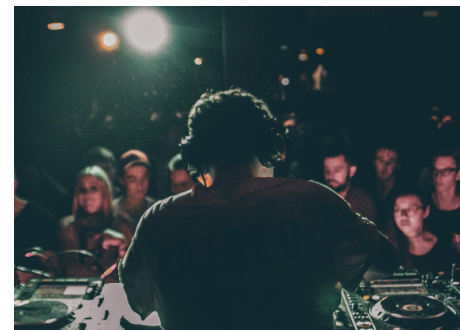
Creating a Safer Space Program

More than ever, people are talking about safer spaces. Organizations large and small, from colleges and universities to bars and festivals, are all asking themselves how they can make their spaces safer, while adopting policies to ensure the wellbeing of the communities they serve. But what exactly is a safer space and how does one go about creating one? This guide outlines a basic framework to create and deliver a safer space program. While these principles can be applied to many different types of spaces and groups, the focus of this guide is entertainment, arts, nightlife, and festival communities.

If you have any questions about how to adapt these guidelines to your space, or are interested in learning more about institutional support, please contact SACE at education@sace.ca, or call our office at **780.423.4102**.

What Is a Safer Space?

A safer space is a place where people can fully and comfortably participate without fear of being harassed or discriminated against because of their biological sex, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, cultural background, religious affiliation, age, or physical or mental ability. You might notice that we have used the term “safer space” rather than safe space. This is to communicate that no space can ever be 100% safe for all people because everyone’s requirements to feel safe are different. Using the term safer space also reflects the fact that discrimination and harassment can and do occur even in spaces where norms, policies, and procedures have been put in place to prevent such behaviour, and that the work of increasing safety is an active process that should never be considered “done”.





Assemble Your Team

Creating safer spaces policies and procedures that take the experiences of all people into account is a next to impossible task to take on by yourself, so you'll want to start by assembling a team. Your team should include significant representation from your organization's leadership, as well as advocates and allies within the community you serve.

Try to maximize the different perspectives around the table by collaborating with people who have different lived experience from yourself. This means your ideal team should have diversity in terms of gender, race, backgrounds, and roles within your organization. You might also consult with your community to learn about their safety needs and concerns. This could look like soliciting feedback, sending out a Google form poll to learn about people's needs, concerns and perceptions, or hosting a "town hall". Make sure to fairly compensate team members and consultants for this important work.

Create Your Safer Spaces Code of Conduct

With your team assembled, the first step in creating a safer space policy is to clearly define your space's core values. Ask yourself: What do you stand for? Who do you want to feel safe in your environment? What kind of behaviour do you expect from your management, staff, volunteers, and patrons? What behaviours will not be tolerated?

With the answers to these questions in hand, you can draft a formal code of conduct for your safer spaces policy. This statement should let everyone know what the rules of your space are, who is welcomed there, what rights and responsibilities each person has when they enter your establishment, and how to bring concerns about safety or respect forward.

If you would like help getting started on drafting your code of conduct, contact SACE for further resources at education@sace.ca.

Consequences and Response

The next question you need to ask yourself is: What happens when someone violates your code of conduct? As an example, let's say someone comes to you and tells you they were groped on the dance floor. Do you give the person who caused harm a warning and the chance to change their behaviour? Do you kick them out for the night? Do you ban them from your bar? What if the person doing the harassment is a member of your team?

Ultimately, these are decisions that you and your team will have to make in accordance with your values. No matter what you decide, it's vital that you have a policy to follow. Having formal policy in place helps to ensure that you and your team respond in a consistent way each and every time you notice or are notified that someone is using harassing or discriminatory behaviour. A consistent response is key if you want your code of conduct to be taken seriously, and for creating a safer space.

Bystander Intervention

In addition to being consistent, the way you respond to a code of conduct violation should also promote the safety of everyone involved, especially the person experiencing the harm. Ask yourself: "How can I stop the harmful behaviour without escalating the situation?" Intervening in these types of scenarios doesn't always have to be confrontational. In fact, there are many creative and effective ways to step in that don't escalate things.

For more information on how to intervene, consider booking a bystander intervention workshop with SACE. You can also learn more by visiting sace.ca/learn and selecting "bystander intervention" from the top SACE Learn Topics.



Prioritizing the Person Who Experienced Harm

Finally, when harm does occur in your space, your response should always centre the needs of the person who experienced that harm.

Some ways that you can do this are:

- Let the person who has come forward know how much you appreciate their willingness to share their concerns
- Give the person who experienced harm space to talk about what happened and listen attentively
- Validate their feelings. Believe their account of events. Don't blame the victim/survivor.
- Let them decide what happens next. If possible give them options, such as asking whether they want you to keep an eye on the other person, go talk to them, or have them removed.
- Let them know how you are going to address the situation and be transparent about any mandatory policies that need to be followed
- Offer options for support to the impacted person. Would they like a ride called? Do they need a few minutes in a quiet space to compose themselves? Let them know you are there to support them.

Ensure your safer spaces policy provides a basic framework for responses, while also being flexible enough to consider the needs and agency of the person who experienced harm. It is important to consider the survivor/victim's input without making them responsible for difficult decisions regarding how your agency moves forward. Ultimately you are responsible for safety in your space


Putting it into Practice

While policies are important, even the best safer space policy is meaningless if your team isn't fully on board. Buy-in from organizational leadership is particularly essential. Without positive role modelling from management and supervisors, staff and volunteers are unlikely to take policy seriously.

This is why your safer spaces policy needs to reflect YOUR values as an organization. When team members believe in the policy, they're more likely to practice and take ownership of it.

To put your policy into practice, your team also has to have the skills and knowledge necessary to act on it. If team members are expected to step in and intervene when they witness harassment or discrimination, they need to be trained in bystander intervention. If they are inviting people to come to them if they experience harm in your space, then it's also important that team members are trained in how to supportively respond to disclosures.

To learn more about these topics, visit sace.ca/learn or email education@sace.ca to book a training session for your team



It's important to note that when you start to promote yourself as a safer space there may be an initial increase in people reporting incidents. Remember that this likely doesn't mean that more incidents are occurring, but rather that people are more willing to trust and confide in your team when they experience harm.



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Go Public

Once you have your policies in place and your team is ready to put them into practice, it's time to go public.

Post your anti-harassment policy to your website and online events, as well as throughout your physical space to let everyone know what their rights and responsibilities are when they enter that space. This messaging should also make it clear who the policies apply to (staff, patrons, artists, volunteers), and outline people's options for filing a complaint if they experience harm. Consider messaging like "if someone makes you feel uncomfortable or unsafe you can report it to _____."

If you want complaints to be made to staff or volunteers, let people know how to find these individuals. Are they wearing a specific colour of shirt, or a button? Is there someone specific to ask for at the bar?

You may also want to make it an option for people to make a complaint privately through your website or social media. Your ultimate goal here is to make your policy and reporting options as accessible as possible.

Final Thoughts

Even with the best policy in place, we can never fully control whether someone experiences harassment or discrimination in our spaces. However, we can send a message that these behaviours will not be tolerated, and that we are invested in the wellbeing of those who frequent our establishments. We can also respond to people who've experienced harm in our spaces with belief and compassion, and make sure that all reported incidents are followed up on with a consistent response.

Taking these steps goes a long way towards promoting respect in your space, and shows your community that you care. That's work worth doing. It's also important to remember that you're not alone in this process. There are many groups in our city and around the world that have taken on safer spaces projects. Do your research and consider reaching out to them for guidance and inspiration.

You can also contact SACE. We offer policy and procedure consultation, as well as training on a variety of topics that will help get your team ready to launch your safer spaces program. All of our services are offered at no fee. For more information email **education@sace.ca**, or call **780.423.4102** and ask for Institutional Support.

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